Fact Sheet
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United States Missile Defense: Technical Details

The United States is planning to field ten U.S. long-range ground-based missile defense interceptors in Poland and a mid-course radar in the Czech Republic in order to counter the growing threat of missile attacks from the Middle East.

Proposed Footprint of the System

* The approximate size is 275 hectares (approx 680 acres) for an interceptor missile site and approximately 30 hectares (12 acres) for a single radar site.

* The United States estimates approximately 200 military, Government civilians, and support contractors will be required to operate the interceptor site. The United States estimates approximately 150 personnel will be required to operate the radar site.

Technical Aspects of the Interceptor Site

* A total of 10 interceptor missiles in underground silos would be located at the facility in Poland. The interceptor base will require facilities for electronic equipment for secure communications, missile assembly, storage, maintenance and security.

* The ballistic missile defense interceptors that would be installed are for purely defensive purposes and have no offensive capability. They carry no explosive warheads of any type, relying instead on their kinetic energy alone to collide with and destroy incoming warheads. Silos constructed for deployment of defensive interceptors are substantially smaller than those used for offensive missiles. Any conversion would require extensive modifications, thus precluding the possibility of converting the interceptor silos for use by offensive missiles.

Debris Issues

* Intercepts occur in space at very high altitudes (above the atmosphere). The vast majority of the threat warhead and the interceptor are reduced to small pieces that burn up upon reentry. A few small pieces may survive reentry, but pose little threat to people and property.

* The odds of damage or injury from an intercept are very small. European interceptors would not be used for flight tests, and would only launch during an actual attack on the United States or Europe. The small risk of debris posed by an intercept pales in comparison to the alternative -- which is a conventional or WMD missile attack on a populated area.

Technical Capabilities

* The United States missile defense system has been proven effective through repeated testing. Since 2001 the Missile Defense Agency has had 26 successful missile intercepts; fifteen of the last sixteen flight tests have been successful.